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Memcon with Gar Alperovitz on Hiroshima and Smithsonian

GA has never spoken with Harwit, Neufeld or Crouch. Agrees with my axiom on museums: Like the Hippocratic oath for doctors-- "Above all, do no harm," museum curators should undertake to tell no falsehoods.

Thus: They should not say that Grew's recommendation that we should allow the Emperor to remain as a figurehead was rejected by Truman.

Nor that the Magic messages at the time of Potsdam indicated that the Emperor or the military still hoped to retain some captured territory. (Gar says that early in May, messages may have indicated that they hoped to explore this in negotiations with the Russians: that the Russians might have been tempted to split some territory with them. But not later. He isn't sure when this was dropped; but it had been by August 9-10.

On my speculation that the Bomb might have had an effect of shortening the war by a day or two, or even of discouraging high-level military participation in a coup, he says, yes, it's possible, though highly speculative and unlikely to find any direct evidence. But he doubts it, because he thinks the military were totally preoccupied with the role of the Soviet military in Manchuria. I.e., (I take it) once the SU had entered the war, they weren't likely to try to overthrow the Emperor and continue the war.

He acknowledges that even after both bombs and Soviet entry, they were still holding out both for keeping the Emperor and three other conditions: but he says that when the Emperor chose only the first condition, they accepted "without batting an eye." Likewise, when the US failed to give this assurance unequivocally (the US message was ambiguous, in between a rejection and an acceptance), they continued to ask for more explicit assurance (just as Byrnes was arguing for a stronger rejection) but again, they accepted the Emperor's decision without cavil.

I point out that one cannot rule out that they were influenced in both cases by the bomb and the prospect of more bombs any minute (as was the Emperor: might he not have been influenced by this, as his words indicated?). He accepts the possibility, but clearly believes it was the Soviet entry that influenced them, and would have done so even without any Bomb. Moreover, they were worried about the ongoing process of having their armies in Manchuria chewed up by the Soviets. (Did I understand this point correctly? Would they have cared?)

I point out that they were surely concerned about getting an assurance, if possible, that they themselves would not be put on



trial by an international court, any more than the Emperor; and they might have pursued this further, even arguing with the Emperor, unless...what? the Bomb? Or the Soviets? or both? GA agrees with their interest, but thinks it was the Soviets that led them to give in on this point.

On Newman's piece in the Post: the Post will soon print his reply.

The thrust: Newman misrepresents GA on Walker, in saying, "Walker's writings are misrepresented by Alperovitz. He quotes Walker as approving his thesis about atomic diplomacy." GA does not. (He paraphrases himself as having said that Walker "says there is a consensus that the bomb was unnecessary, and that the officials knew it was unnecessary. That is a little misleading: ...there were alternatives, and they knew it. Also, all approaches (including the bomb) might fail, given the possibility of a coup: which the officials did perceive as a possibility, did they not? (Or was this just hindsight, justifying the bomb?)

GA doesn't rely on either of the studies after the war: just a throwaway reference.

Moreover, GA had read the interviews behind the USSBS. They are rambling; and they were not asked the "obvious questions": what if the US agrees to keep the Emperor? and what if the Soviets came in?

On one of the quotes, about the Army's plan to fight to the death, the official was asked, Would it have really been carried out? and the answer was immediately, "Oh no, the Emperor would never have permitted that." ! (But might the Emperor have been deposed? GA clearly thinks not, once the Soviets had come in.

On Bart Bernstein's "careful analysis" (Newman) concluding that "Ike did not tell Henry Stimson it was a mistake to drop the bomb, despite what Ike says in his memoirs...self-serving claim," (Newman), GA says BB's argument is, in this case, unusually thin and weak. "I've said that to Bart, and he looks sheepish." All he has is that Ike's accounts get more detailed as they go along, which is true, but doesn't prove anything; especially since it is a progression from Chief of Staff, to Columbia (candidate), to President, to memoirs, and it is a question of criticising Truman.

GA says that one of BB's weaknesses (the other being to go off on irrelevant tangents that do nothing but illustrate his scholarship) is to, as I put it, give ex cathedra judgments of whether a particular motive is "primary, secondary or confirming," without giving either any criteria for judging these or any evidence for a particular judgment.

GA says JCS, including Leahy, did recommend modifying or spelling out surrender terms at Potsdam--like Forrestal, Stimson, McCloy (and earlier, Bard, Strauss, Grew, and the Szilard



petition). If BB says (I think he does) that the JCS did not, and joined hst and Byrnes i rejecting this, he would like to know the reference.

GA: "They all 'knew' that a combination of offering to keep the Emperor and the Soviet entry would bring about a surrender before November." (I mention possibility of coup: he discounts, given Soviet entry.)

GA discounts, for reasons he hasn't told me, the role of domestic controversy in rejecting making the offer to the Emperor. (This is critical to his conclusion that desire to use the Bomb--vs. the Soviets--was solely the reason to reject. (How about using the Bomb for the scientists' and Groves' purposes?)

[Later: I don't see how GA can explain in this way Byrnes' later resistance to accepting the "understanding" about the role of the Emperor in the Japanese surrender message of August 14. Stimson, Leahy and others wanted to accept immediately, but Byrnes' said the President would be crucified politically if he departed from UCS and kept the Emperor. They had already used the Bomb, twice; and the Soviets had entered the war; and delay in accepting the surrender risked continuation of the war and further Soviet penetration into Manchuria (proving again that this was not of highest priority): so how can this be explained other than by Byrnes' explicit reasoning on domestic controversy? And doesn't that indicate that it was a probable factor--or at the very least, a factor that can't be dismissed--earlier, at Potsdam?

Mike Neufeld describes the Alperovitz thesis as being that Truman and Byrnes "knew" (for certain) that they could end the war quickly without the Bomb, and chose to prolong the war simply so that they could use it, for effect with the Soviets. (GA did say to me that "they all knew" that a combination of offer to the Emperor and Soviet entry would end the war). Neufeld is influenced, in part, by a Tom Drea (?), a military historian who has written a book on ULTRA and is familiar with the MAGIC intercepts, who insists that the message of the intercepts is very ambiguous and tells little about what the Japanese conditions for surrender might be. But he acknowledges that the only mention of holding on to territories was "in April," (and was it MAGIC or ULTRA?), not in June or July. (Their script #5 said that the July intercepts discussed by Stalin and Truman in Potsdam concerned the Emperor's desire for a compromise peace in which they could hold on to territories. False. I quoted from Sigal, on July 11 Togo-Sato cable in which they renounced holding on to any territories.